

# THE FREETHINKER

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## THE DANGERS OF BEING FASHIONABLE

"O Lord, deliver me from my friends!" runs the old saying, "for I can look after my enemies myself." I imagine that this mood occasionally comes over any sensitive liberal nowadays. Those of us who have been involved in "progressive" movements for, say, five years or more, no doubt feel this way when faced with some of the naïve, ephemeral, or plain neophilic notions glibly trotted out by new arrivals, fair-weather friends, or camp-followers. The remedy for this passing disenchantment is usually very simple and quite effective: a glance at the correspondence columns of the *Daily Telegraph*, or at the latest encyclical from the bring-back-the-gallows brigade, SPUC or the Festival of Light, will serve to remind any *bona fide* rationalist that there is nothing quite as sickening as the old opposition.

### The Conservation "Bandwagon"

However, there are times when this does not quite suffice. Long before it was fashionable, for instance, a small, cranky minority of us kept nagging on about pollution, over-exploitation of resources, and the tragic destruction of rare wild life. Now all that has changed and every trendy for miles around is jumping on to the conservation bandwagon. If thereby the said waggon picked up momentum and reached its goal, all would be well, but the cause of progress never did run smoothly. Only recently we have heard the oracle according to Mr. John Aspinall who solemnly informed the media that if he had to choose between the life of his 14½-year-old daughter or an entire animal species he would sacrifice his daughter, and that "Speciocide is more serious than Bangladesh or Ulster or Vietnam."

Taken at its face value this means that Mr. Aspinall would prefer to save the last viable colony of plague bacteria or disease-carrying mosquitoes rather than his own flesh and blood. He is, of course, entitled to such an opinion (to practice it is another matter), but hardly to be respected for it. This is not what conservation is about; it is cant, with rather nasty fascist overtones.

### Brutalised Elitists

We are all doubtless familiar with humanists who really prefer their cats to their fellow human beings (who can blame them!), but to postulate this as a serious social ethos is monstrous. Once we start practising the idea that art, science, rare animals or historic buildings are more important than human life, we undermine the basis of tolerance, trust, and *mutuality* upon which human goodwill, society, and ultimately progress, is founded. We would become a breed of brutalised elitists that did not care a tinker's cuss for each other, let alone the lynx or the blue whale.

Another sickening example, for those of us whose still small voices pleaded for birth control and small families long before it was the "in" thing to do, concerns a man who recently looked after three children who had been abandoned by their parents. He started receiving anonymous letters and 'phone calls accusing him of aiding and

abetting the population explosion, and advising him to smother the children. Such vile nonsense, is of course, of splendid propaganda value to professional reactionaries. Peter Simple, for instance, commented, apropos of this incident: "The continual propaganda against birth . . . may not actually have its roots in a hatred of living people. But it may well be helping to spread that hatred and even clothe it with reason and respectability." A chastening point.

*Freethinker* readers are doubtless familiar with the biblical parable of the mote in thy brother's eyes and the beam in thine own. Humanists, conservationists, and real libertarians will very soon have to consider what they are going to do about some of their "beams" before these obscure the path to achieving the worthwhile changes in the world that they are striving for. The answer probably lies in vigilance, rather than easy speeches.

### THE MARTYRDOM OF MAN

"Famine, pestilence and war are no longer essential for the advancement of the human race. But a season of mental anguish is at hand, and through this we must pass in order that our posterity may rise. The soul must be sacrificed; the hope in immortality must die. A sweet and charming illusion must be taken from the human race, as youth and beauty vanish never to return."

With these words Winwood Reade concluded his masterpiece, *The Martyrdom of Man*, described by Michael Foot as "the gospel for heretics. Nowhere is the case for heresy placed better in its historical setting."

As far as we can tell, the first edition of *The Martyrdom of Man* was published on or about 1 May 1872, and so to mark its centenary we publish in this week's *Freethinker* independent assessments of this remarkable work by two writers who, like Michael Foot, have been much affected by it. Despite the passing of a century, *The Martyrdom of Man* is still in print, and still well worth reading.\*

\* The paperback edition of *The Martyrdom of Man* is obtainable, price 60p, plus 12p postage, from G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London SE1 1NL.

# "THE SECULARIST'S BIBLE": READE'S 'MARTYRDOM' A CENTURY AFTER

R. C. CHURCHILL

Whether God has ever been English is a debatable point. What is beyond dispute is that in his chief work of literature, the Bible—first published in 1611 and frequently reprinted—he founded one of the major traditions in English literature, setting English fiction, in particular, on its triumphant course.

In the beginning was the Word—and the Word was God. But it soon became available to more ordinary mortals. Bunyan agreed in advance with the Victorian rustic that "plain English was good enough for St. Paul, so it was good enough for him." By writing *The Pilgrim's Progress* in the style of the Authorised Version—a down-to-earth style in the main, though capable of rising to lyric and epic heights—Bunyan created a model for the more symbolic kind of English fiction, a model still followed to some extent two centuries and more afterwards by unorthodox novelists like Hardy, George Moore, Lawrence, and T. F. Powys. The Elizabethan style of the Deity is also to be observed in the poetry of Milton and Blake, the prose of Carlyle and Ruskin. It can be traced, too, appropriately enough, in the Victorian classic that is often called "the Secularist's Bible", Winwood Reade's *The Martyrdom of Man*, the centenary of whose publication we celebrate this year.

Reade's epic history of mankind is a seminal work of unholy writ, an Unauthorised Version which vies with Darwin's *Origin of Species* in having deposed in the minds of many thoughtful readers the orthodox, "revealed" account of the Christian universe in favour of a strictly evolutionary account, in which the God of Nature—"the One of whom we are the elements", "that Unknown God", as Reade calls him—has "ordained that mankind should be elevated by misfortune and that happiness should grow out of misery and pain."

First published in 1872, *The Martyrdom of Man* is the only book by its Anglo-Scottish author—who died three years later in 1875 at the early age of thirty-six—which has been widely read, appealing to readers of many different shades of belief and unbelief. Wells acknowledged its strong influence upon him, Sherlock Holmes recommended it to Dr. Watson, it has impressed public figures from Winston Churchill to Michael Foot, and no less a Christian apologist than Malcolm Muggeridge has confessed that it "makes the Book of Genesis seem quite pedestrian and prosaic."

## Justified by Events

A note to the Thinker's Library edition (1932) points out that "it is interesting to note how far Winwood Reade's predictions have been justified by events"—an observation even more interesting today in this centenary year. How far was Reade right, we must ask ourselves, and how far was he wrong?

Apart from a few details, obviously out of date, such as "the Arab sheikh of the present day lives precisely as Abraham did three thousand years ago" (Thinker's Library ed., p. 4), "then, as now, a girdle of beads was the essential part of an African young lady's dress" (p. 33) and

"in point of fact America is the happiest country in the world" (p. 409), Reade's main error seems to have been that, like most Victorians, he took too rosy a view of the years ahead of him, years—including the Hitler years—which are now behind us, we hope in all senses behind us. He was no facile optimist, but he did think that on the whole "famine, pestilence, and war" were things of the past and that in 1872 we were in for "a season of mental" rather than physical "anguish", in which "the soul must be sacrificed; the hope in immortality must die" (p. 437). In the event, the century since his book was published has seen both mental and physical suffering, the latter on so huge a scale that the sacrifice of immortality by the human mind, the decline in belief in some sort of future life, seems comparatively unimportant. "There are no new symptoms of anguish on that score," as J. M. Robertson remarked in his introduction to this edition; "the belief in a future life has rather gone on receding, as it was clerically admitted to be doing before."

On the other hand, Reade's predictions that "it is not probable that war will ever absolutely cease until science discovers some destroying force . . . so horrible in its effects that . . . battles will be massacres which the feelings of mankind will be unable to endure" (pp. 405-6) and that "the earth being small, mankind will migrate into space, and will cross the airless Saharas which separate planet from planet" (p. 413), both these predictions were pretty accurate forecasts, of nuclear warfare and of the start of the space age, where we can but echo the author's sentiments.

## A Cultural Diffusionist

In his diffusionist view of culture, Reade seems to have been confirmed, both by ethnologists like Elliot Smith and anthropologists like Lord Raglan, and also by those like Thor Heyerdahl who have put their theories to the test. In Reade's insistence, against the view of previous historians, that Africa was of primary importance in the history of mankind, developments during the century since his book was published have tended to confirm him, in the field of anthropology and archaeology as well as in politics. "Population will mightily increase" (p. 412) is a forecast that has proved too true for comfort, and we can only hope that's Reade's too confident corollary—"and the earth will be a garden"—will not become an entire contradiction.

We come back, on every re-reading, to the sheer impressiveness of the book. "Scenes . . . linger in the memory," writes Michael Foot in the introduction to the Humanist Library edition (1968), "like verses learnt in childhood, and the whole resembles an epic poem." Twenty years ago, in an article in *The Literary Guide* (May 1953), I tried to indicate by examples one of Reade's chief methods towards this end, the way in which he separates the historical highlights of the book by paragraphs of geographical information. We are just, for instance (p. 38), leaving the history of ancient Egypt:

. . . and now a time was coming when gold could no longer purchase repose, when the horrified people would see their temples stripped, their idols dashed to pieces, their sacred

animals murdered, their priests scourged, and the embalmed body of their king snatched from its last resting-place and flung upon the flames.

And the next sentence, new paragraph, begins: "A vast wilderness extends from the centre of Africa to the jungles of Bengal . . ."

Or we are considering (p. 52) the problem of the rise of ancient Greece. Again, historical peroration followed by geographical facts:

. . . How was it that they who received from Egypt the canon of proportions and the first ideas of the portraiture of the human form, afterwards soared into the regions of the ideal, and created in marble a beauty more exquisite than can be found on earth—a vision, as it were, of some unknown yet not unimagined world?

The mountains of Greece are disposed in a peculiar manner . . .

We might compare this "peculiar manner" of Reade's,

these flights of historical eloquence divided by solid chunks of geographical information, with the lists of Hebrew begettings that give a breathing-space between the poetry and the prophecy, the legends and the laws, of the Old Testament. They are a reminder, too, that Reade was an explorer of space—in the geographical sense—before he became an explorer of time. He was one of the pioneers in the exploration of the source of the Niger in 1968-70 before (in Robertson's appropriate Biblical phrase) he "lifted his eyes" to "the vision of the immeasurable river of Time and conceived the dazzling enterprise of tracking that." Time, Reade's believed, was as eccentric a river as the Niger itself, but could nevertheless be traced to its source and followed to its probable outlet without the need of supernatural revelation. Such is the power of the masterpiece in which he embodied these ideas, and such has been its influence, that many more readers today than a century ago, when it was completed and published, agree that he was right.

## WINWOOD READE: THE PASSING OF THE GREAT ILLUSION

ERIC GLASGOW

One of the books which afforded the inspiration of my youth is *The Martyrdom of Man*, by William Winwood Reade (1838-1875), and it is useful to remember that the centenary of its first publication occurs in 1972. A quarter of a century ago, I was fascinated by both its deep acquaintance with African and Oriental history and conditions, and its cascading torrent of language. As I re-read it today, a maturer and perhaps wiser man, I am rather surprised to discover that much of its fascination has not abated: the book remains impressive, honest, and incisive, and it well deserves to be perused, even by those who may not agree with its basic conclusion—that the "sweet and charming illusion" of Christian immortality must be bravely discarded.

George Sampson, whilst admitting its "pessimistic" thesis, and its old-fashioned style and facts, describes it as "a book of genius," which "can never lose its value."<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, *The Martyrdom of Man* becomes a "far-seeing masterpiece."<sup>2</sup> So it is still, whatever our present reactions may be to Winwood Reade's headlong and passionate assault upon the religious conventions of Victorian England. Indeed, it is quite possible to neglect the religious conclusions whilst appreciating very highly the history, from the emergence of Western civilisation in Egypt to the crucial triumph of "Intellect", the final and liberating development of Winwood Reade's own age. It is a history of the world, brilliant and enduring in its insight and its synthesis: an effective milestone, somewhere between the work of Sir Walter Raleigh (1614) and that of H. G. Wells (1920). One cannot be surprised, therefore, that Wells, in his preface to *The Outline of History*, expressly acknowledges his debt to Reade, whose "fine gloom" had evidently yielded its interludes of sublime and creative lucidity.

### Masterly Use of English

Reade's "indignant agnosticism"<sup>3</sup> is too strident and aggressive even to be scientific. Nevertheless, *The Martyrdom of Man* is still a very engaging book, certainly worthy

of its place in English literature, even if its Christian interpretations are shallow and prejudiced. As a study in the masterly use of the English language it has rarely been rivalled.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps, in the end, Winwood Reade's resolute rejection of the supernatural claims of Christianity did not greatly affect the "great debate"—the Victorian conflict between science and religion. His book, although effective as an interpretation of the world's history, scarcely broke the surface of the claims of Christian theology: certainly it could never be regarded as a dispassionate study or appraisal. But we should read it today—a full century later—because of its rich and pervasive colour, its vivacity, and its overwhelming sincerity. As a young Cambridge student I was prone to quote, with admiration, Reade's uncompromising statement in his preface that he had to write as his conscience bade him, "without evasion, without disguise." So, *The Martyrdom of Man* came to represent, even for my generation, a luminous and significant example of freedom of thought and belief, securely set within the lasting limits of those quiet and printed pages.

### Practical Heroism

The book cannot, of course, be separated from the other facets of its author's life—his extensive travels in West Africa between 1862 and 1866, his work as special correspondent of *The Times* during the Ashanti War (1873), and his other writings, especially *The African Sketch-Book* (London, 2 vols., 1873). Nor should one ignore the practical heroism of an author who—despite his lack of the stimulus and comfort of the Christian faith—wore himself into an early grave (he died on 24 April 1875) with his prolonged African experiences. Martyrs are not confined to the ranks of the Churches; and it is evident that Reade's most outstanding title, *The Martyrdom of Man*, signified his own experience, as well as his understanding and assessment

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The views expressed by contributors are not necessarily those of the Editor or the Board.

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## ANNOUNCEMENTS

*The Freethinker* is obtainable at the following addresses.  
London: Collets, 66 Charing Cross Road, WC2; Housmans, 5 Caledonian Road, King's Cross, N1; Freedom Press, 84b Whitechapel High Street (Angel Alley), E1; Rationalist Press Association, 88 Islington High Street, N1; Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1; Freethinker Bookshop, 103 Borough High Street, SE1. Glasgow: Clyde Books, 292 High Street. Manchester: Grass Roots Bookshop, 271 Upper Brook Street, 13. Brighton: Unicorn Bookshop, 50 Gloucester Road, (near Brighton Station).

National Secular Society. Details of membership and inquiries regarding bequests and secular funeral services may be obtained from the General Secretary, 103 Borough High St., London, SE1. Telephone 01-407 2717. Cheques, etc., should be made payable to the NSS.

Freethought books and pamphlets (new). Send for list to G. W. Foote & Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1.

Humanist Postal Book Service (secondhand books bought and sold). For information or catalogue send 5p stamp to Kit Mouat, Mercers, Cuckfield, Sussex.

Humanist Holidays. Details of future activities from Marjorie Mepham, 29 Fairview Road, Sutton, Surrey. Telephone: 01-642 8796.

## EVENTS

Ashurstwood Abbey Secular Humanism Centre (founded by Jean Straker), between East Grinstead and Forest Row, Sussex. Telephone: Forest Row 2589. Meeting every Sunday, 3 p.m.

Brighton and Hove Humanist Group, Imperial Centre Hotel, First Avenue, Hove. Sunday, 7 May, 4.30 p.m.: tea-party, followed (5.30 p.m.) by Annual General Meeting.

Havering Humanist Society, Harold Wood Social Centre, Gubbins Lane. Tuesday, 9 May, 7.45 p.m.: M. Lines, "Chemical and Biological Warfare—the Facts."

South Place Ethical Society, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Sunday, 7 May, 11 a.m.: Richard Clements, O.B.E., "Voltaire and the Impact of the Individual." Tuesday, 9 May, 7 p.m.: Adrian S. Bosman, "Chiropractice."

# NEWS

## STILL AT PRAYER

"In his spare time . . . is an amateur wine maker and helps at the Family Service held at the Parish Church."

—From the election handbill of the Conservative candidate for a Kent constituency.

## SUNDAY THEATRES BILL

The offices of the Lord's Day Observance Society doubtless resounded to wailing and the gnashing of teeth when it was announced on 21 April that the Sunday Theatres (No. 2) Bill had passed its committee stage and third reading thanks to what David McKie of *The Guardian* called "a cunning tactical move" by Mr. Hugh Jenkins, Labour M.P. for Putney. It was, said the Secretary of the L.D.O.S., "a sad day for Britain."

It was not, however, a sad day for the National Secular Society, which welcomed the Bill—hardly surprising, as William McLroy, the N.S.S.'s General Secretary, is a keen theatre-goer! "This is," he said in an official statement, "an important victory in the battle for Sunday freedom, in which this Society has been involved for over a century."

"During the last twenty years several Private Members' bills to reform the Sunday observance laws have been defeated at Westminster through government timidity and unscrupulous tactics by the sabbatarians. We hope that the success of Mr. Jenkins's bill will encourage others to press for the abolition of obsolete Sunday regulations governing sport, trade and licensing laws."

The new legislation allows theatres to open on Sundays from 2 p.m., though both actors and management may continue, of course, to take Sunday as a rest day. It is probable, however, that many workers in the entertainment world will prefer to perform on Sundays, and have Monday off instead.

## ECUMENICAL EXORCIST'S MANUAL

"The widespread apostasy from the Christian Faith . . . is revealing the presence and the power of evil forces . . . The need, therefore, for the restoration of the practice of exorcism to its proper place is becoming steadily more urgent and more evident," says the Anglican Bishop of Exeter, the Right Rev. Robert Mortimer, in a 58-page report (edited by Dom. Robert Petitpierre, O.S.B.) calling for the training of Catholic and Church of England priests in the ancient art of casting out hobgoblins and other supernatural undesirables. The report also recommends that each diocesan bishop appoint a priest as diocesan exorcist.

The report further recommends incantations for dealing with "all evil spirits, all vain imaginations, projections, and phantasms; and all deceits of the evil one . . ." According to *The Times's* Religious Affairs Correspondent, Basil Gingell, the report suggests that after one prayer "the priest may then make the sign of the cross over the place, or *exhale deeply*" [our italics]. No wonder it also suggests that those present should only consist of "mature Christian people who are sympathetic to this ministry."

Rationalists may be further impressed—even perhaps gratified—to know that one of the many places requiring

# AND NOTES

the services of an exorcist recently was, according to the *Evening News*, the Inland Revenue Department of Somerset House. Ah well, just so long as these mediaeval Christians do not find an "urgent and more evident need" to restore witch-hunting, the Inquisition, and the stake . . .

## THIS WICKED WORLD

Once again that strange relic, the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa, has girded its Afrikaner loins and snarled defiance at the world of reality, and flesh, and the devil of liberalism. The Church's Southern Transvaal Synod, meeting recently at Pretoria, has solemnly denounced, among other sins of the darkest die, masturbation, dancing at wedding receptions, and organised sport on Sundays. No doubt they will soon get down to doing something about the profane and shameless manner in which the sun has the temerity to shine on the Sabbath, as well.

## MINI-SKIRTS: "A WILD HABIT"

We do not imagine that the Dutch Reformed Church and President Jomo Kenyatta have much in common, except, perhaps, an aversion to mini-skirts. Kenya's President, who has hardly been in the forefront of the women's emancipation movement, recently announced that he was considering a ban on mini-skirts, which he regarded as "a wild habit that has propelled the pace of prostitution." This, coming from a former protagonist of "wild," revolting, and useless habits such as female "circumcision," impresses us not at all.

## ANTI-ABORTIONISTS INTERNATIONAL

The church militant, especially its Catholic wing continues to marshal its pew fodder against the 1967 Abortion Act. At Aylesford Priory, for instance, a special Mass was held on Easter Monday to pray for the success of the National Anti-Abortion Rally, starring Malcolm Muggeridge and Leo Abse, M.P., which was held in Liverpool last Sunday.

This march—or countermarch—of the Anti-abortionists and the present law in Britain can be compared with the case that pertains across the Atlantic, in Canada, where Dr. Henry Morgentaler of Montreal, a leading member of the Humanist Society of Canada, went on trial on 23 March on charges of performing, and conspiring to perform, illegal abortions. In our 25 March issue we touched upon the case of a French-speaking mother of four (from Quebec) who had arranged to have an abortion in an Ottawa hospital, only to have an injunction against the abortion (written in English) served on her by her husband, assisted by David Dehler of the quaintly named "Alliance for Life." A few days before the woman's appeal against the injunction was heard, Dehler gaily quipped: "She's happy as hell. She'll have the child." According to the magazine *Labor Challenge* the Comité pour l'Abrogation des Lois sur l'Avortement is planning a day of protest against Montreal's anti-abortion legislation on 6 May, to coincide with demonstrations for women's right to abortion in the United States organised by the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition.

Lorne Grant of the Ontario Women's Abortion Law Repeal coalition neatly summed up the campaign to legalise abortion in Canada in these words: "Our struggle is international because around the world women are made criminals for seeking abortions. But the opposition to us is international, too." And if there is one thing more sickening than abortion it is the opposition to it!

## CHRISTIAN UNITY IN BIRMINGHAM

Christians may have spent centuries torturing and butchering each other over theological hairsplittings, but in this year of grace, 1972, there is nothing that unites the various denominations so much as to go politicking in support of obscurantism and repression in sexual matters.

Readers have probably heard that candidates in the Birmingham municipal elections have received a questionnaire from the Order of Christian Unity (a "broadly-based association of Christians of all denominations") which attempts to ascertain their attitudes to sex education. The loading of the questions is, of course, pretty predictable, but one of them is worth quoting in full, namely:

2. Do you believe, in view of the present epidemic of venereal disease, that the health risks of pre-marital sex should be explained to pupils by carefully trained and selected teachers and doctors?

By the sound of things, the Order of Christian Unity could certainly use "a little talk." To any normal person the most obvious health risk of *pre-marital* sex is a premature, or unwanted pregnancy. Venereal disease, with very few exceptions, is spread by casual and promiscuous sexual activity, either before or after marriage. "Carefully trained and selected teachers and doctors" can doubtless assure the Order of Christian Unity that even a marriage ceremony performed by the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Pope will provide no immunity *per se* against syphilis or gonorrhoea.

## ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Miss Sophia Jex-Blake has delivered an address at St. George's Hall on the medical education of women, Lord Shaftesbury in the chair. Without arguing the question of the rights of women, Miss Jex-Blake assigned several reasons why the medical profession was peculiarly adapted for the practice of the fair sex . . . Dr. Manning, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Westminster, has issued a circular order to the clergy of his diocese prohibiting the employment of female vocalists in their church choirs after the end of September next.

—From *The National Reformer*, 5 May 1872.

## VIOLENCE IN SCOTTISH SCHOOLS

"The strap is grossly misused all over Scotland and the rule of fear still operates in many schools. There is a code of corporal punishment which is approved by the Scottish Education Department and the teachers' organisations but it is ignored daily. This is particularly true of Roman Catholic schools where there seems to be an even greater incidence of corporal punishment than elsewhere."

—Mr. Douglas Gilchrist, primary school teacher and vice-chairman of the Scottish Regional Executive of the National Union of Teachers.

**David Tribe, former President of the National Secular Society, will take part in the Radio 4 (Home) programme, "Questions of Belief," at 7.30 p.m. on Sunday, 7 May.**

## BOOKS

**THE FREETHINKER**, Vol. 91, (1971). Edited by William McIlroy. G. W. Foote, £2.50.\*

There are so many reasons why every secularist, rationalist and humanist—take your pick of these labels—should have this bound volume of *The Freethinker* for 1971 on their shelves that I lack the space to enumerate them. Yet why underline the obvious? The editor must be congratulated on the expertise which packs eight pages with such stimulating material and interesting information without giving an uncomfortable sense of over-crowding or crude surgery. A minor, but no means unimportant feature, is the skilful layout.

I know from experience the difficulties of editing a humanist journal. You cannot please everybody. Somehow you have to walk a tightrope, avoiding two extremes. My own formula was to try to keep a little left of centre. Perhaps *The Freethinker* is rather more to the left in this sort of spectrum, but that emphasis is needed when trendy Christians retreat behind a smoke-screen of pseudo-scepticism. There is nothing mealy-mouthed about the atheism of *The Freethinker*, but it does not descend to cheap sneers or vulgar abuse. It carried from its beginning under G. W. Foote something of the Voltairean tradition of *Ecrassez l'infame*. This was recalled at the ninetieth birthday celebration by Brigid Brophy. She also paid tribute to the paper's sense of history.

What seemed so shocking in the early days of *The Freethinker* no longer carries such an emotional charge. This testifies to the success of rationalist assaults, but to its credit *The Freethinker* has never supposed that the final battle has been won. In this volume we are reminded time and again that the religious establishment still walks the corridors of power, and must be wary of those dignitaries who bear Greek gifts.

However, the occasional necessity of bishop-bashing was never more than one part of *The Freethinker's* functions. It cannot be reproached with mere negativism. A study of the main topics dealt with during 1971, for example, shows a very positive attitude to a range of vital social problems. Some of these demand attention from all sections of the secularist movement: e.g. birth control, civil liberties, censorship. The tiresome antics of Lord Longford and Mrs. Whitehouse are an obvious target. What may not be sufficiently realised is that very practical help as a pressure group can be provided through channels such as *The Freethinker* to organisations which are forbidden to agitate for political action because of their charitable status. A case in point is the campaign by the Family Planning Association.

Despite the tax relief which charities receive, the price is high, and *The Freethinker* would have been gravely inhibited by such restrictions. Freedom throws considerable responsibility on the editor, especially of a weekly, but boldness has always been a characteristic of *The Freethinker*. It does not shrink from criticising its friends when it seems to be necessary. Thus Avro Manhattan was prompted to make a spirited reply to an article entitled "Beating the Drum for Ian Paisley."

Ireland is a hot potato, but no one would expect Bill McIlroy to fight shy of it. A less emotive but very tricky subject is the Common Market. Not all secularists will agree with F. A. Ridley that a United Europe, on the

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present showing, would be a triumph for Vatican diplomacy, but everything he writes on such a theme is backed by scholarship and deserves to be treated with respect.

True to its liberal tradition, *The Freethinker* does not demand blind conformity. It would be insufferably dull if its readers obediently toed a secularist party line. The book reviews, which are excellent, provide an opportunity of assessing some of the most significant of contemporary trends from personal perspectives. Finally, not the least attractive section of the journal is "News and Notes," a feature which was once mistakenly dropped. It now consistently maintains a high level of comment and information which is invaluable ammunition for the debater.

HECTOR HAWTON

\* Bound volumes of *The Freethinker* for 1971 may be obtained, price £2.50 (plus 25p postage), from G. W. Foote and Co. Ltd., 103 Borough High Street, London, SE1 1NL.

## THE BLACK AND WHITE BOOK

by Sydney Cook and Garth Lean. Blandford Press, 20p.

Here is yet another young person's guide to the Christian way of life. Produced by Moral Re-Armament it aims at convincing young people of their need for "God's guidance" and for "absolute standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love." The authors are obviously aware that all this sounds rather old-fashioned and so they have dressed up their message in the latest style.

The first twelve pages are devoted to discussing the need for a "revolution which builds an unselfish society without destroying innocent millions in the process." The authors describe the kind of world they would like to see and are careful to make it sound very attractive. Not until page 19 is God introduced: "Experience has shown that through the centuries God is available to those who really want to know Him." Great emphasis is laid on the need for prayer, but as might be expected this is to be none of your old down-on-your-knees-hands-together stuff. Our "revolutionary" authors describe prayer in these terms: "Like guerilla fighters picking up instructions by radio, we can tune in daily to the Commander-in-Chief."

The authors have some anecdotes for us: "Take the case of John. Fifteen years old, he sat at the back of the class and seemed to have no brains. He was utterly lazy and planned to leave school at sixteen." Of course once John saw the light and grasped "absolute standards" everything changed and he is now "lecturing at a university."

Or what about Alan who "began stealing and became slack in his work." He even went "on the streets as a homosexual." Then came the turning-point: he put "God in charge of his life" and "obtained a 'First' and a Doctorate of his university."

Another of their stories features Frank Buchman, "the man who more than any other started the stream of new lives recorded in this handbook." Several of Buchman's sayings are recorded here, but the authors have conveniently omitted his most famous remark: "I thank heaven for a man like Adolf Hitler." In this connection it is worth noting that although this little book devotes some space

# REVIEWS

to denouncing Nazi policy, it is well known that M.R.A. pointedly refrained from such denunciations at the time. It seems that "absolute standards of honesty" still leave a little room for hypocrisy.

The authors have some comical views on sex. They warn about "the grip of masturbation" which "makes you so self-absorbed," and too much sex makes you "moody, self-centred, dull-eyed, bad-tempered, sloppy at work." And once again we meet the old chestnut: "The best contraceptive is the word 'No'." Oh yeah?

The publishers of this book describe it as the "first British contribution to the international debate started by the Danish *Little Red Schoolbook*." But of course the first British contribution to the debate was to attempt to silence it, by suppressing and censoring that book. That is the kind of "debate" that Christians love. The authors of the *Black and White Book* can rest assured that most young people will never be allowed to hear a serious challenge to the Christian arguments.

MICHAEL LLOYD-JONES

# THEATRE

**DON JUAN** by Molière. Shaw Theatre.

No one has exposed manners and morals, charlatans and humbugs as well as Molière. His characters pass across the stage, dallying in the middle, mouthing platitudes without becoming boring, outraging without alienating us, charting seventeenth-century France without rotting on an alien beach. But if he successfully resolves his own paradoxes; translators, actors and directors are not always so successful.

This is especially true of the rarely seen *Don Juan*. It is not surprising that the drama had a brief triumph in 1665, with Molière himself playing the part of the sermonising servant Sganarelle (the hero of another short play), before vanishing till after the playwright's death. At first sight the satirical target is Don Juan, an amoral freethinker who believes in nothing but his own convenience and pleasures and systematically lies not only during his seductions but in repelling abandoned wives, jilted fiancées and dunning creditors. On reconsideration, however, the courtly establishment might well wonder whether the hero, who at least admits his hypocrisy to his servant, is really cast in a less favourable light than his cowardly brothers-in-law, Don Carlos and Don Alonso, and the canting superstitious Sganarelle, a perfect parody of both conventional morality and "situation ethics," whose only concern after his master's death and damnation, the prospect of which he has long relished, is over who is now to pay his wages.

There are many ways of coping with the Molière canon. Most usual, and I think best, is to play it as costume drama with the sort of stylisation cultivated by the French court. Though the character of Don Juan was virtually contemporary when this play was written and was not the archetypal legend he has since become, it is possible today to present him in the "dateless" context of a morality play. As he is rather like the modern anti-hero, sexy, ruthless, rootless, it is quite possible to update the whole thing as

a Joan Littlewood mixed-media event or an Adrian Mitchell poetry-and-music charade. A programme note suggests that the dramatist was moved to write the play by Tiberio Fiorilli, pillar of the Italian Commedia dell'Arte, and one of the peasants is actually called Pierrot, so we must accept that the play can be presented as a sort of Punch and Judy show. What cannot, in my view, be done successfully is to put all these styles—with a few other idiosyncrasies thrown in—together.

In John Chapman's translation and direction philosophy and worldly wisdom compete with the latest slang dialogue, presented by actors in costumes and mannerisms that are a strange blend of period, pantomime and science fiction, where somersaults mingle with *School for Scandal* obeisances, and Don Juan's father and the brigadier turn up like things from outer space; Dons Alonso and Carlos seem uncertain whether they are meant to be popinjays or pansies (only very special accentuation of certain lines justifies the latter interpretation); and the peasant girls Charlotte and Mathurine clown as pantomime dames. Add to this echoes of Hollywood square dance callers and Butlin Holiday Camp M.C.s, a set painted like Harlequin and dominated by a pyramid and slippery-dip, centre spots, back projection and a harlinquinade up the side aisles, and no one can say the production lacks inventiveness! Somewhat surprisingly in this avalanche of trendiness the climax is allowed to slip by with merely the supporting characters waving their arms round Don Juan to simulate flames.

The young actors of the Cambridge University Theatre Group flutter as well as can be expected in this kaleidoscope of styles. As Sganarelle David Thompson reproduces every comic gesture and accent from the sixteenth century market-place to the modern television studio and incredibly gets away with it, just. Tony Maples' slapstick "dame" Charlotte is very funny, but this interpretation quite loses Molière's delicate satire of the unromantic calculations that dominate lower-class no less than aristocratic matrimony. In the title role Jonathan Coy speaks his lines and dissimulates beautifully, though he sometimes ties himself in knots with specious gestures. Indeed, this can be said of the entire evening. If it is enjoyable—and on balance it is—it is against all the odds.

DAVID TRIBE

## WINWOODE READE: THE PASSING OF THE GREAT ILLUSION

(Continued from page 147)

of the record of the world's history. Of course, he wrote in 1872 to demolish the "great illusion" of the Christian belief in the hereafter. Probably, nowadays, his arguments have been so much accepted that it has become no longer necessary, or original, to advance them. At any rate, there can be no denial of the importance of *The Martyrdom of Man* both as a work of English literature and as a contribution to the development of English agnostic thinking between Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859) and T. H. Huxley's Romanes lecture at Oxford on *Evolution and Ethics* (1893).

### NOTES

- 1 SAMPSON, George. 1970. *Concise Cambridge History of English Literature*. 3rd ed. (Cambridge): p. 704.
- 2 SAMPSON, *op. cit.*: p. 935.
- 3 BAUGH, A. C. 1948. *A Literary History of England* (London): p. 1590.
- 4 It is probably on that score alone that it has been listed in the bibliography of the authoritative *Cambridge History of English Literature* (vol. 14, 1916: p. 479).

# LETTERS

## Euthanasia and Suicide

"The Right to Die" (*Freethinker*, 22 April) was yet another example of the frightening Mustapha Mond mentality prevalent in contemporary humanist thought. Peter Crommelin set himself up as the chief arbiter on human existence, seated upon a throne of gilded logic, whence he decreed that when our lives become "supremely sad" we should have the right to slip down the "emergency exit" of a "lethal draft or injection."

Can Mr. Crommelin not see that the truly pitiable elderly relative, who has no wish but to die, is the most horrible condemnation of him, of myself, of the whole of our society? Because the world in which she is placed causes her great unhappiness, she should not be allowed to think herself unfit for such a world. It is the world that is not fit for her: and that we can, and must, change. If we have created a civilisation in which some people cannot live, we do not extinguish those people, or drive them to a situation where they extinguish themselves; instead we do our utmost to alleviate the circumstances which are causing them this pain. Civilisation was created for man, by man and not vice versa.

With care, kindness and love the lot of Peter Crommelin's relative could be altered tomorrow. Not by any individual effort, but by a change in the attitude of our whole society towards those such as herself: the sick, the aged, the infirm and the unfortunate. We need them as much as they need us. Each suicide is a tragic reminder of our failure. By agreeing to voluntary euthanasia we accept that failure, and by doing so we become indifferent to it. There are ways of making people joyful apart from killing them.

Remember that we are of one race, in which to accept as irreversible the suffering of one is to accept in principle the despair of the whole. ". . . Therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

J. STEWART ROSS.

## Imperialism: Statistics or Neurosis

A burglar friend of mine complains that those who have been conditioned into unreasonable attitudes regarding the convention of private property have reactions varying from hysteria to violence when he acts in his uninhibited fashion.

If that is claptrap it is no more so than the article by Mr. Reader "From Freud to Ireland." Imperialism is a large scale, systematic and institutionalised form of robbery. Attempting to justify it in terms of half-baked psychological jargon is service to neither internationalism nor to rationalism.

Discrimination against Catholics in the six counties was and still is a matter of statistics not of neurosis. Could it be that Mr. Reader is himself subject to an irrational "rationalist" neurosis?

SEOSAMH FLOID.

## The Basis of Social Unrest

Since Freud, numerous writers have stepped out of their field and applied psychoanalytical concepts to accounts for historical events. R. Reader (22 April) seeks to illuminate the problem of "Ireland" with "Freud", and says psychiatrists are needed. Can we allow ourselves to be politically and sociologically so naïve? "Anxiety repressed into the unconscious" does not help to understand sociology or politics.

There are psychological reasons for "internment" being "useless"; however, most psychiatrists as well as "politicians, financiers and economists" must remain blind to them as their life-style is determined by particular individual interests, dependent upon the *status quo*. The common weal is for most of them only pretence. The psychological basis for the present social unrest seems to be the growing demand for human equality.

PAUL ROM.

## The Craig/Bentley Case

Before commenting on David Yallop's letter of 22 April, I should like to make it clear that I have long been a supporter of a public inquiry into the Craig/Bentley case and am thankful for Mr. Yallop's concern and efforts towards gaining that inquiry.

Towards the cause of "freethinking," however, I would submit that Mr. Yallop's letter does not acquit Michael Lloyd-Jones, as a reviewer, from certain reasonable criticisms. Surely one does not have to read Mr. Yallop's book in order to question the general implications in his reviewer's statement that "it would seem self-evident that once Bentley was under arrest he could not justly be held jointly responsible for anything Craig did after that arrest." In my questioning of that statement, I did not—as Mr. Yallop states—declare "that the fact that a person is under arrest does

not affect his responsibility for the subsequent actions of an accomplice." What I *did* question was a general point arising from the specific Craig/Bentley case and covering responsibility for any encouragement of a crime after arrest. I have no knowledge concerning legal precedents in this matter and I raised the points as a matter of concern for "reasonable and just" standards. I would agree with Mr. Yallop that the first step towards "improving" general legal standards in such matters is to have a public inquiry into any particular case where there is reason to question legal standards—and standards of humanity—involved in that case.

As regards the implications in Mr. Lloyd-Jones's review that illiteracy and epilepsy are necessarily connected with diminished responsibility, I agree with Arthur Francis that such implications display an insensitivity to, and ignorance of, the diverse nature of illiteracy and epilepsy. It is surely much more significant to be informed that Derek Bentley "was mentally retarded with an I.Q. of 66 and a mental age of 10" than that he was "an illiterate and epileptic sufferer."

Surely, reasonable criticism can never be an "irrelevance" in *The Freethinker*.

CHARLES BYASS.

## Attitudes to Epilepsy

I have no wish to have a battle of words with David A. Yallop on the subject of epilepsy. He certainly has my thanks in any effort he has made to enlighten the public on the terrible ignorance of this subject. But there is no need for him to hit the moon because I remarked on what I read in a review. He *has* had to come to the rescue.

ARTHUR FRANCIS.

## Paul, Jesus and the Early Christians

Statements by Paul which are commonly held to imply that the Jesus of his faith was a recently deceased human being are (i) his references to "James the brother of the Lord"—this being taken to mean blood-brother of the historical Jesus; (ii) his single mention (1 Cor. 15:5) of a Christian group he terms "the twelve", and (iii) his references to Cephas, whom he on one occasion calls Peter. Of these three points I have dealt with (i) in my recent *Freethinker* article. As for (ii), even some Christian scholars (e.g. Klein in a searching study on the *Twelve Apostles* published at Göttingen in 1961) have argued that "the twelve" familiar to us from the gospels are fictitious, and that Paul's reference is to a group who had no knowledge of the historical Jesus. Similarly (iii), what Paul says establishes only that there was an early Christian leader named Cephas who (like Paul) had experienced a vision of the risen Jesus. On my view, this was later elaborated in gospel accounts which stress the physical reality of his resurrection, and which make men who are represented as having known him during his lifetime witness it soon after his death. It is, as E. Dinkler noted in the *Theologische Rundschau* (25, 1959; p. 199) quite generally true that developments in the early Church were at a later stage represented as rooted in the life of Jesus.

G. A. WELLS.

## Guaranteed Adequate Income

An item of news that may well be of interest to *Freethinker* readers is the demand by the National Federation of Claimants' Unions for a guaranteed adequate income (G.A.I.) per person, including children at the same rate as adults. Incidentally, this was urged by Bernard Shaw at the turn of the century.

The C.U. suggests a rate of £10 a week for everybody at the present time. If implemented, the demand would, of course, have the revolutionary effect of ending the present financial dependence of women and children upon men.

I have written to the Claimants saying that I would wholeheartedly support their campaign so long as some way can be found of nullifying any incentive it may give to producing more babies.

BARBARA SMOKER.

## THE MARTYRDOM OF MAN

By WINWOOD READE

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